

Once you get it, it's unquenchable...



THIRST

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INT. POLICE STATION MORGUE - CONTINUOUS

It's small: cinder block walls, with two CADAVER LOCKERS against the far wall. The lockers are labeled with temporary tags: "FLAHERTY, BRETT M." and "FLAHERTY, STEVEN P."

FOUR MORE BODIES ON GURNEYS, zipped-up in thick, black, plastic BODY BAGS crowd the tiny space. Paul sees these labeled as well: "FLAHERTY, LUCY P."; "COLLINS, MARK"; "COLLINS, JASON F. (MINOR)."

A town like this doesn't expect to have more than one foul play at a time, but Paul is surrounded by death in the cramped environs. He finds what he was looking for: the last BODY BAG, labeled, "GREIS, DANIEL D."

He wheels Dan's gurney to the center of the room, clicking on the OVERHEAD LAMP, a harsh glow igniting the space, shards of brightness bouncing off the body bag's sleek plastic.

Paul slips on a paper CORONER'S GOWN and GOGGLES. He finds a small, handheld electric-rotor SKULL SAW, examining it before placing it on the gurney next to Dan's head.

Paul slowly unzips the body bag, exposing Dan's pale and bloated face, shoulders and chest. He looks with trepidation down to Dan.

PAUL

I'm sorry, Dan...

WHHHIIIRRR!!! The skull saw starts up as Paul brings the spinning blade down into Dan's forehead. He drags it across unevenly, slicing away efficiently at Dan's face meat.

A mist of blood spurts up in a neat cloud; bits of skin and flesh are tossed aside into the air. Paul wretches as fatty bits and severed hairs pepper his face. He looks away, ashamed, but he has to keep going.

CHUNK! The saw abruptly cuts out. Paul looks down to see half of the circular blade lodged in the side of Dan's head. Paul regards the rest of the machine in his hand: what's left of the blade is bent and broken. It's useless.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Paul gazes to the far wall, where - like a peg board in someone's garage - other tools of the trade hang. Paul regrettably eyeballs A MANUAL BONE SAW. He moves to the wall and grabs it.

He moves back to the side of the gurney, bracing a hand against Dan's chest, then begins SAWING THE TOP OF HIS FUCKING SKULL OFF like it's a log of firewood.

Long, sickening, grinding strokes echo off the walls as the teeth of the saw catch, then chip away bone.

Now the blood and sputum doesn't unpredictably fly into the air, but thick, almost black blood oozes from the widening wound, pooling on the cool metal tray below Dan's head.

GRRRT! GRRRT! GRRRT! The saw is stubborn, but soon the crevice in Dan's face grows in depth. More colors are visible beneath the eroding strokes of the saw: the gelatinous yellow of fat, orange of muscle, then the yellowish-white of skull.

Paul groans - from disgust, from the exertion. The task is overwhelming physically, mentally and emotionally; the cost of hacking a trusted friend's fucking face off.

GRIZZ-GRIZZ-GRIZZ. Digging into the skull, now Paul's found a literal and figurative groove. The saw moves with ease, what was once a jagged sawtooth slogging through thick ivory is now a hot knife through butter.

GRRRK! - GLACK!!! The saw falls through the bone, plunging at once into the neon pink of still somewhat-fresh brain matter. A sick quiet falls over the room as the worst of Paul's work is over with.

He sets the saw aside, ooze slathering the nicked and tarnished blade. Paul fishes his fingertips into the chasm he's carved in Dan's cranium, PRYING his skull apart!

SCHLLIIIIICKKK!!! Paul yanks the two halves of Dan's head apart, like splitting a watermelon. He recoils from the stench, but, holding a small flashlight in his teeth, begins to poke and prod at the still-firm brain within.

Paul notices SOMETHING. He JAMS the flashlight length-wise in between the two edges of skull, holding them wide open. He probes into the brain with a pair of FORCEPS.

Vile bubbling and choking sounds drip out of Dan, as air rushes into tight anatomical vacuums for the first time, dislodging innards and settling biohazard into new nooks and crannies. Despite the revolting symphony, Paul persists.

He CLAMPS down on something in Dan's mangled brain pan, withdrawing the forceps rigidly. They finally snap back, free of the RESISTANCE Paul was pulling against. He holds the medical tongs close to the overhead light.

In the forceps is a single, writhing, twisting, 12-inch long strand of tough, sinewy fibers, dark brown in color and no eyes or mouth to speak of: A GORDIAN WORM.

His face flushes white, his greatest fears made material. He searches the wall counters for a container, finding a PLASTIC CYLINDRICAL TUB, not unlike tupperware, and depositing the Worm in it, pressing a lid down on it with a hermetic pop.

CHRISTINA (O.S.)

What the hell are you doing here?

Christina stands in the doorway in tennis shoes, pajama bottoms, and a hoodie, hair up in an un-combed ponytail.

STARTLED, Paul jerks away from the table.

PAUL

Jesus! What are you doing here?

CHRISTINA

Silent alarm. You'd know to reset it if you were, y'know, on the fucking police force. What are you doing here, Paul?!

She steps into the room, noticing Dan under the overhead lamp. Tears well in her eyes. Her voice cracking:

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

What did you do to Dan?!?!

Christina runs to Dan. Despite the gruesome state of his remains, she still holds him, cradling his head and placing a hand on his midsection. She WEEPS over his corpse. Paul watches, empathetic, but awkward. Finally:

PAUL

I can explain.

Christina remembers Paul, wiping away her tears, apoplectic rage replacing pure heartbreak. Somewhat calmer:

CHRISTINA

You're going to explain? Breaking and entering? Abusing a corpse? You're going to jail, asshole. Holy shit, Paul, I thought Dan was your friend!

PAUL

He was!

CHRISTINA

Well, he was my mentor! And I have a pretty good idea of what he would have wanted when this day came. And it wasn't to get dissected by some tourist who knew him for two weeks.

PAUL

Listen, I found a huge clue and I -

CHRISTINA

You're not one of us, Paul! You're not a cop and you're not even a real local. You've got no right to be nosing around here, let alone...

She can only look back to Dan's destroyed face and yawning skull.

PAUL

I'm sorry about this. I didn't want to do this, trust me, but please hear me out.

CHRISTINA

Fuck you. I'm going to go unlock my gun and handcuffs so I can arrest your pathetic ass.

She steps past Paul, still berating him.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I don't give a shit about whatever case you think you're building in your own head!

She leaves and walks RIGHT INTO BRUCE! She's scared shitless. Bruce - also frazzled and still in his civilian dress - looks to them both.

BRUCE

I do.

INT. POLICE STATION - LATER

On Bruce's desktop computer, Paul has pulled up the WIKIPEDIA PAGE for NEMATOMORPHA: accompanying the text is a lone, BLURRY PHOTO of a GORDIAN WORM - it's a match for the critter Paul yanked out of Dan.

Paul nervously paces as he explains what exactly NEMATOMORPHA is:

PAUL

The Gordian Worm. They're water-borne parasites. They get into a host organism as microbes, then begin to mature and grow inside. They leech nutrients and proteins, staying alive without the host ever knowing. When it's time for the worm to spawn, it gets into the brain of the host, hijacks their motor capabilities, overrides their very instinct to stay alive, and literally directs the host to drown themselves. Then the fully grown worm escapes into the water and spawns. And the cycle starts again.

Bruce pushes his chair away from his computer, sighing, removing his glasses.

BRUCE

Well, I guess this explains Dan, but...I don't think we've got a thirsty worm epidemic on our hands.

CHRISTINA

I'm with him.

Paul shoots Christina a glare, bothered by her antagonism.

PAUL

Think about it. The Flahertys have lived on that lake their whole lives - all of a sudden none of them can swim? I SAW Mary jump. She could have gotten out, but instead she tried to pull me in.

CHRISTINA

Sounds like you're spinning a yarn to cover up that whole Mary thing. Why were you out there on the dock with her?

Again Paul looks to Christina, miffed by the implication.

PAUL

You think I'd kill someone?

CHRISTINA

You just carved up your new best friend without a second thought. I don't know what you're capable of.

BRUCE

Paul, if this thing was in the lake, wouldn't half the town be acting up by now?

Paul looks to him, exhausted vulnerability shining through his crumbling facade of bravado. He sinks into a chair.

PAUL

I don't know. You have a point.
(a beat)
Has anything else strange happened at the lake lately?

Bruce's eyebrows raise ever so slightly. Christina looks to him. They share a glance of sub-verbal communication only certain professionals in certain professions ever master.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What? Something did happen?

Bruce nods to Christina: "Take it away." Christina sighs.

CHRISTINA

'Bout a month ago. Local girl, Brooke Barnes. Goes for a skinny dip in the lake with a boy toy - Jake something.

PAUL

What happened?

CHRISTINA

Well, they went in together but only Brooke came out. She was hysterical. All three of us, me, Chief, Dan, we tried to work her for a statement, let alone a confession.

BRUCE

All we could figure was that something very strange went on in that water.

PAUL

And you didn't think to bring this up?

CHRISTINA

Relax, Columbo. It was kids screwing around late at night.
(MORE)

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Drinking and drugs, and Brooke was probably high on something and was imagining things.

PAUL

Where was Jake from? Was he one of these seasonal workers from another town? He could be the host who brought the parasite to the lake.

BRUCE

I'd have to pull the case file.

PAUL

What about Brooke? Would she know?

BRUCE

Her parents took off for their resort in Florida about 6 weeks ago. She's on house arrest until the county judge gets back from his summer recess.

PAUL

Let's go talk to her.

CHRISTINA

Chief! Are we really gonna let this tourist wedge his way into an active investigation?

PAUL

Doesn't look very active to me.

Christina stares daggers at Paul's barb, his backbone renewed. Bruce asserts his authority calmly.

BRUCE

You're both right.

(to Christina)

We will go check on Brooke and try to dig into what happened that night.

(to Paul)

You will stay in the God damn car.